

THE  
TRYAL  
OF  
Assurance,

Set forth in a  
SERMON

Preached at *Boston* upon a Lecture day  
July 7th. 1698.

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By *Solomon Stoddard*, Pastor of the Church  
in *Northampton*.

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2 Pet. I. 10. *Brethren give diligence to make  
your Calling and Election sure.*

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# The TRYAL of Assurance.

John 21. 17.

*Simon son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?*

**T**HE falls of the People of God darken their sincerity : they are as a Cloud covering their uprightness : they do make their sincerity questionable unto others : some that take notice of their falls are ready to suspect, and others are ready to deny their sincerity ; flanders by are apt to impute their falls to their Hypocrisy and the reigning power of sin ; as if they had now proved themselves to be Hypocrites. They are ready to say of them, as David said of Doeg, *Lo this is the man that made not God his trust.* And the

ls make their sincerity questionable to themselves: if they have seen something of uprightness in themselves before, now they fear, they are mistaken: they think if there had been any Grace, that would have preserved them from falling: their falls wound their Consciences and disturb their Peace. They think if God had loved them, he would not have suffered them to fall into such sin: it seems to them to be the fruit of Gods hatred: they are apt to think that their sins have turned away the face of God from them, and that he cannot delight in them: they think moreover that if they had loved God, they could not have been given to sin so against him. Satan is wont to prove their falls unto their discouragement; and raises such mills, that day is turned into night to them. Upon this occasion Christ puts this question to *Peter*: the Disciples might be unsatisfied with him, because of his fall; and he might be dissatisfied with himself: but hereby Christ is leading of him into the Examination of his own sincerity. You may conceive Christs meaning thus: *Peter* you have made a Profession many years: but in the time of my affliction, you shamefully denied me; you formerly professed that you would dye with me, before you would deny me, but as soon as the Temptation came; you presently denied me: and as if it were not enough to do it once, you did it a second

and a third time : and as if plain denying had not been enough, you did it with Curling & Swearing : is there any love in your heart unto me ? you shewed some affection but now, throwing your self into the Sea, but is it love ? have I your heart ? am I the object of your love ? you professed more love than other Disciples ; but do you indeed love me ?

## DOCTRINE.

*If a man do's not certainly know, that he performed one act of Saving Grace, he can be certain of his Sincerity from his Walk.*

The Tryal of sincerity is a great and weighty work. Ministers had need be careful in giving Rules of Tryal ; and People had need be careful in applying Rules of Tryal : the Doctrine is propounded to prevent mistakes in this matter. Godly men are described in the Scripture to be men, *that walk in the law of the Lord* ; men *that walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit* : but it is impossible for any man to evidence his sincerity from hence ; unless he certainly knows that he has performed some act or acts of saving Grace. A man may have a probable knowledge of sincerity, though he do not certainly know that he has performed any act of saving Grace : this is all that he can attain to by his walk ;

do not know that he has performed any one of saving Grace. There be many acts of saving Grace ; as to believe in Christ, to love God and Christ, to hate sin, to make the Glory of God one's end : and if a man don't certainly show any such thing by himself : he will never be able from his walk to prove himself to be a Saint. If a thing shine like fire in the night, yet you cannot know it to be fire from thence ; unless you see in it some property of fire. If a man acts as if it had life, yet you cannot know from thence, that it has life, unless you know some action to be a Vital action. You cannot know that a man do's miracles, unless you know some one action to be miraculous : So here.

In order to the clearing of this, I shall first premise three things.

1. They that walk in a way of holiness are sincere : all that walk in a way of obedience are right. Walking in Gods ways is the Character of a Saint *Psal. 119. 1. Blessed are the undefiled in their way, who walk in the law of the Lord.* An holy life is a certain sign of a holy heart. A life of obedience shows a principle of Grace : they that live a life of humility, love and faith are real Saints ; they are such indeed as they do profess themselves to be : though they have many infirmities and corruptions, yet they are sincere Saints. An holy life more than any Hypocrite can attain unto : he may

may counterfeit Holiness and have the image of it ; but falls utterly short of an holy life : an holy life is a life of sincerity and flows from a principle of sincerity : other principles may make a man live a moral and religious life : Prudence, Pride and slavish fear may produce much outward conformity, and many inward affections : but only a principle of Grace can enable a man to live a holy life : all that live holily are regenerate men. *Eph. 2. 10. Created in Christ Jesus unto good works*

2. They that walk in a way of unholiness are not sincere : they that lead an unholy life are not upright : a principle of Grace will keep man from ways of sin. *1 Job 3. 9. He that is born of God, doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God* he has so much fear that he can't live a life of sin, he hates sin so that he cannot live a life of sin : Some that are sincere have a less degree of sincerity than others ; but the least degree of sincerity will preserve a man from an unholy life. *Psal. 18. 23. I was also upright before him and I kept my self from mine iniquity.* An unholy life shows the reigning power of sin. *Job. 8. 34. He that committeth sin, is the servant of sin.* They that are following any Lust are not serving of the Lord : if men make great pretensions of sincerity, yet lead unholy lives, there is no sincerity in them : if they have great affections and hopes, yet they have no

erity : they profess one thing and practise another. If men serve their Pride or their Covetousness, or their Voluptuousness, they are not sincere, they are utterly destitute of a principle of Grace : they have shews of Grace, yet they are but Hypocrites, and will be damned at the last day. Luke 13. 27. *Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.*

3. Many men seem to themselves to walk in a way of Holiness, yet don't certainly know that ever they did perform an act of saving grace ; though all that make an high profession don't seem to themselves to lead an holy life, yet abundance of them do : they are conscientious of their ways, have many religious affections ; mourn for sin, rejoyce in Sabbaths, are thankful for mercies ; are afflicted under the Tokens of Gods Anger, are desirous of the Conversion of others : it seems to them, that they live in the same degree as Saints of old did : they think they walk holily, yet many of these persons don't certainly know that ever they did perform one act of saving grace, several of them never did perform one act of saving grace, therefore they cannot know that they have : and some that have it, are in the dark about it ; they are under doubts and uncertainties about it : the Question is Whether such persons can know from their walk, that they are sincere. This the Doctrine does deny, and it may thus be cleared up.

*Argument.*



*Argument 1.* It is the acting of Grace that makes and shews the Walk to be holy : it is not the orderliness of mens walk that shews it to be holy ; nor the affectionateness of mens hearts in Religion, that shews their walk to be holy ; nor the long continuance of good carriages, nor a good behaviour in a day of temptation ; nor a savoury spirit ; these things may all be, yet the walk not be holy : if there be the acting of love, faith and repentance, then the walk is holy : but all that men do is done in hypocrisy, if there be not the acting of grace : if there be no grace in their prayers, in their fastings, in their discourses, all is in hypocrisy : conscienciousness don't prove their walk to be sincere : the young man in the Gospel was conscientious : *Mat. 19. 20. all these things have I done from my youth.* Zeal don't prove it, a man may be zealous, yet not upright : *Rom. 10. 2. they be the actings of grace that make and shew the walk to be holy ;* if it be not a life of faith and love, it is not a holy life : *Gal. 2. 20. the life that I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God :* therefore he that don't know that he has performed an act of grace, can't know that he has an holy walk : he that don't know that he has that which is the life of an holy walk, and essential to it, can't know that his walk is holy.

2. It is harder to know an holy walk than one act of grace : it is harder for any man to discern that

that he leads an holy life, then that he performs a gracious act: for an holy life does consist of many gracious actions; and it is harder to discern that a man has done many, then that he has done one: it is harder to find out many profitable herbs in the field than one; harder to discern many grains of Wheat among the Chaff, than one: it is harder to find many Evidences of a good Estate than one; to the discerning of many acts of grace, there is required more observation and examination, then to the discerning of one act of grace; if it be difficult to find one, it will be more difficult to find two, ten, an hundred; therefore he that don't know that he has performed one act of grace, does not know that he leads an holy life. I may allude to that, Jer. 12. 5. *if thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee, how wilt thou contend with horses.*

3. If the holiness of mens actions can't be discerned severally, it can't be discerned in conjunction: if a man looks upon his actions severally, and cannot say that this or that or any one was an holy action; he cannot say concerning any action, that it was an act of saving faith; or saving love; how can he when he looks upon his carriage together, say they are holy, if there be no one action that he can say is sincere; how can he say that his walk is sincere: if a man sees an heap of corn, how can he say, it is an heap of wheat, when he does not know, that there is one grain

of wheat there: the sincerity of his walk depends upon the sincerity of particular actions; and if that be hidden from him, how can he say his walk is sincere: if for ought he knows every prayer and duty be done in hypocrisy; then for ought he knows, his whole life is a life of hypocrisy: if he can instance in no action that is certainly otherwise, it may be so for ought that he knows: if he can't answer to this question. *Job. 21. 17. Lovest thou me?* or to that, *Job 9 35. dost thou believe on the Son of God?* or some such like; he cannot tell that he lives an holy life: therefore such a man can't prove his sincerity from his walk. No walk can be evidential, but what is made up of acts of grace; therefore if he sees none, he can have no evidence from his walk.

4. If there be no act of grace, there is no sincerity; therefore if he sees no act of grace, he sees no sincerity; when there is no act of grace, there is no principle of grace: though a man walk in print, yet there is no sincerity; many carry themselves very fairly, but if there be no grace, there is no uprightness in them, *Job 5. 42. I know you, that you have not the love of God in you;* it is all counterfeit walk: they are like men upon the Stage, that personate other kind of men; so these men walk like Saints, and talk like Saints; but if there be no act of grace, they are no Saints; they want that which does constitute a Saint; therefore if a man do not know any act of grace

In himself, he can't know himself to be a Saint; though he walk like an Angel.

5. The multiplication of such acts as are common to Saints and hypocrites, don't shew him to be sincere; prayer is common to Saints and hypocrites. *Psal. 78. 34. When he slew them, then they sought him, they returned and enquired early after God;* therefore if a man do this a thousand times, it don't prove him to be a Saint; so morality is common to Saints and hypocrites. *Mat. 19. 20. and if a man carries morally, twenty years together, it don't shew him to be a Saint;* so zeal, so delight in Sabbaths; if an hypocrite may do these things, then the multiplication of them, and walking in such a way is no evidence; that which is common, let it be multiplied never so often, don't become saving: multiply cyphers, and they make no number: therefore there can be no evidence of a good estate from a mans walk, unless he knew some act of grace; if he can't discern some act of saving grace, he must be at a loss about his sincerity.

### U S E I.

See the reason why many Professors are unsatisfied about their sincerity; though they have a pretty good conversation, are conscientious, affectionate, zealous, yet they are full of fears, they are often perplexed, and don't know what to make

make of themselves; it seems to them that their walk is pretty much according to rule, but they do not know that ever they did perform any act of saving grace; they can't answer to such questions, *Lovest thou me?* Joh. 21. 17. Or *dost thou believe on the Son of God?* Joh. 9. 35. this does create a deal of perplexity to them; and they are afraid what will become of themselves, after all their profession. And there are three sorts of them.

1. Some Professors never did see any act of grace in themselves; they never had any: and therefore could not see any: they have had affection, but no love; sorrow, but not godly sorrow; encouragement, but no faith. There be many Professors that are utterly deficient of gracious carriage, they have the resemblance of them, but they never had any exercise of grace; they are *spiritually dead*, and never did perform any act of *spiritual life*; thus it was with *Saul, Doeg, Achitophel, Judas* and *Demas*, they were only the picture of Saints, and imitated the actions of *Spiritual Life*, but did not perform them; *an evil tree can't bring forth good fruit, men can't gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles*: Mat. 7. 16, 18 they can't see acts of grace: men cannot see that which is not.

2: Some Professors never did certainly know that they have performed any act of saving grace; they have discovered the workings of grace some

times in themselves, but not so plainly, as to be able to speak roundly up to it, as *Peter* did, *Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee?* *Joh. 21. 17.* they understand that there is a great deal that does resemble grace, that is not grace; and so they doubt whether it be of the right kind: they know that there is a temporary faith, *Luk. 8. 13.* *some believe for a time, and then fall away;* and there may be strong desires and delight, where there is no sincere love; here may be great pangs of affection, without any uprightness, and the acts of grace were not so clear, as some others do speak of, hence they are not fully satisfied; as when one sees a man at a great distance, he is at some loss whether it be a man.

3. Some have certainly seen the workings of grace, but through temptations since, they have lost the certainty of that knowledge; at the time they knew they did believe in Christ, and that they loved God, and could say as *David*, *Psal. 116. 1.* *I love the Lord;* and as, *Psal. 46. 1.* *The Lord is my strength and refuge:* but afterwards they have not so full and clear a remembrance of it: and God brings them into affliction, and unbelief prevails, and now they are suspicious that they were mistaken; besides, God don't hear their prayers, they have sought him many a time for such & such a mercy, and he has denied them at last: besides, they find a dead heart, corruption strong, and have had no such plain working

of Grace a pretty while, accordingly they are full of fears whether they are not mistaken : they say if there were no deceit in it, how comes it to be so and so with me ?

## U S E. II.

Others cannot be certain of a mans sincerity from his Conversation : if others see men carry well, they presently say, they are good men but they don't know it from thence ; there is indeed ground enough for Charity ; but not for Assurance : for whatever mens Conversation be if they don't see the actings of Grace, they cannot be assured that the man is a Godly man. It is not good to depend upon the judgment of others, for they do not know, whether a man be sincere or not. All the external acts of Charity, Piety, Justice and Sobriety, may be performed by a man that has no Grace ; Prudence and Conscience may produce them all : and one that has no Grace may carry as well in the eye of the world, as he that has it. *Peter* does but suppose *Silvanus* to be faithful. 1 Pet. 5. 12.

*Consider* 1. The inward actings of Grace are invisible to others. A man may look into his own heart, and see the actings and workings that are there ; but he can't look into the hearts of others ; men can't tell what actings there be

in their understandings and wills: men can't see when they act, nor what they act, nor what they act upon; nor how they act: men can't tell whether they chuse or refuse. *Jer. 17. 9. The heart is deceitful above all things, who can know it?*

2. Men cannot by words or actions make the actings of grace so visible to others, that they can distinguish them: if a man talk graciously and walk graciously, he can't make another certain that he does so: another that sees the external action, can't certainly distinguish it from a formal action; if he satisfy another, yet he can't assure another, that it is a gracious action: a man may speak like an Angel, yet not have charity; *he may give all his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burned, and yet not have charity, 1 Cor. 3. 1, 2, 13.*

### U S E III.

*Of Warning,* That you be not confident of your sincerity from your walk, without the certain knowledge that you have performed any act of saving grace: some men will be confident that they are in a good estate, though they do not know that ever they believed in Christ, or have exercised any true love to God: all that they have to say for



themselves is, that they have a conscientious call to do their duty, and are many times affected in a religious way, and hope, they do trust in Christ and make the glory of God their end; and they find affection to the people of God: but this you may be sure of, you can't conclude your sincerity from your walk, unless you know that you have performed some act or acts of saving grace: if you do know that, then you have reason to conclude your walk to be holy: where there is one act of saving grace, there will be more: there is the principle, but without this you cannot conclude it.

*Consider* 1. If you be sincere, this confidence is meer flattery; good men sometimes think they are good upon such foundations as will not hold, as because God does the things that they have prayed for; because he smiles upon them in his Providence; because others think they are Saints: so this is one way of flattery: if you be upright, yet you can't tell it from your walk, if you do not know that you exercise grace: for ought any thing that you know, your life is a life of hypocrisy: men may do all that you know you do, and yet be hypocrites; your walk can't be evidential to you, if you do not see the acts of grace, your confidence is presumption; men must go upon a sure bottom, 2 Cor. 13. 5. *Examine your selves, prove your own selves; & this flattering &*

Keep that you are fallen into does you much hurt : this makes you neglect a good confidence, and exposes you to live a careless life, without any great matter of the life of religion.

2. If you be not sincere, it may prove your ruine; some men that take notice of their conscientiousness do conclude themselves godly, when they are ungodly : and fall short of a principle of grace : they are destitute of faith and love, Joh. 5. 42. *I know you, that you have not the love of God in you* : but because they imagine that they are sincere, they rest in their present attainments, Joh. 9. 41. *because you say we see, therefore our sin remaineth* : when they are stirred up to get sincerity, they hope they have it already, they hope others will take the warning, and that their children will hearken, but they think themselves are out of danger : counsels and warnings are lost upon them, they bless themselves in their present estate, they think their disease is cured, and so give over the use of means ; they think they are provided for Eternity, and so they are at rest : they are under some endeavours to get more knowledge and more grace, but not to be Converted : hence this work is neglected ; when once they have taken up such a conceit that they are godly, they have got their deaths wound, if mercy do not prevent : they live carelessly, and when they come to dye, they will be shut out of

the Kingdom of God: there will be no room for them in heaven, Mat. 25. 12. Depart from me I know you not. Isa. 50. 11. all you that kindle a fire and compass your selves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks which you have kindled, this shall ye have of mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow.

#### U S E IV.

*Of Direction:* To Saints how to get the knowledge of your sincerity; by getting such visible actings of grace, that you may know them certainly to be the acts of saving grace: it is a great exercise to some Saints, whether they be sincere Saints, they labour in it for many years; and one Minister gives signs, and they try themselves by them, and another gives signs, and they try themselves by them; and sometimes they think they see the signs of Saints, and sometimes the signs of hypocrites: and they don't know what to make of themselves: the best way is to get full exercise of grace, that you may know it to be grace; don't let grace lie in a withering condition: let it flourish, that it may act visibly: then you may certainly know it: your walk with God, this, will never clear up your good condition.

*Consider.* 1. There is good use of signs provided they be true signs warranted by

right interpretation of the Scripture ; though many signs that men give are very fallible : but if the signs be good, there is very good use to be made of them ; though a man may seek signs of signs endlessly ; yet they are of good advantage to beget a probable knowledge of a mans good estate ; many persons are encouraged and supported by them. *1 Joh. 3. 14. Hereby we know that we are passed from death to life, because we love the brethren :* and they be a further confirmation to those that have had Assurances of their sincerity : when they find Scripture signs falling in with those evidences, which they have formerly received, they are further established thereby.

2. But the visible actings of Grace will satisfy all sorts of Christians. We may distinguish Christians into two sorts ; some are persons of great understanding and knowledge, they have a deep insight into those ways of deceit and hypocrisy that the heart is subject to : and they are apt to be puzzled with questions and doubts, that fly over the heads of others ; they are afraid of such deceits as other men don't suspect : but when they have plain visible workings of Grace, that they know to be Grace, this fully satisfies them : *Thou knowest that I love thee. Joh. 21. 17.* Others are weak and ignorant and can't give many signs of true Grace,

nor distinctly take them up, when they are laid down: yet when they plainly see the visible actings of saving Grace, the thing is put beyond question. A weak woman is as well satisfied that she loves her child as the wisest man in the land, though she can't make a large discourse upon it, nor prove it by intallible signs, because she feels her love: so it is in this case.

3. Though the visible actings of Grace may be counterfeited, yet they that have them, may know that they have them. There is nothing but may be counterfeited, men may counterfeit themselves to be great men and holy men: Gold and Silver, and Jewels may be counterfeited. So these visible actings of Grace; men may have very strong affections; where there is no love or godly sorrow. *Matt. 8. 19. Master I will follow thee whither soever thou goest. 1 Sam. 24. 16. Saul lift up his voice and wept.* Men may say Hosanna to day, and Crucify to morrow. Yet those that have the visible actings of Grace know it. He that dreams thinks he is awake, but he that is awake, knows he is awake: though there be counterfeiters, yet the visible actings may be known at the time.

4. If men have such visible actings of Grace but now and then, they will be of great use to them as long as they live: though they may

may be after that Exposed to great Temptations, yet these actings of Grace that they have seen, will be a stay to them: they will work an abiding hope in the heart; they will often have occasion to call to mind the years of the right hand of the most high, and their Song in the night. If a man should live many years after, he will not forget this. *Psal. 63. 2. That I may see thy power and glory, so as I have seen thee in the Sanctuary.* If he has great Temptations from deadness and from Gods with drawings; this will come to mind, and so he will have hope: and the more such acts are repeated, the more advantage he is under to have a settled Assurance of his sincerity.

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